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Irish Rock Music Amid a Time of Troubles: Thin Lizzy and U2 as a Bridge during a Time of Division

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the Department of History.

By
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Under the mentorship of Dr. Alan C. Downs

ABSTRACT

The Troubles were a period of crisis and violence in Ireland in the latter half of the twentieth century. Loyalists, Unionists, Republicans, and Nationalists brutally fought against each other over the issue of whether or not Northern Ireland should remain in the United Kingdom or join the Republic of Ireland to form one united country. The conflict also resulted in ethnic and religious tensions for many Protestants and Catholics who were compelled to choose sides over this issue, owing to their ties to the deep-rooted history of animosity between the two Christian populations. As a result, the Troubles, which lasted from the late 1960s to the late 1990s, were a violent time that witnessed hate crimes and religious clashes in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. At roughly the same time as passions escalated into violence in the 1960s, a new genre of music was gaining popularity in Ireland. Rock and Roll became an outlet for bands to break barriers, defy norms, and express opinions in a creative and non-violent way. Two bands in particular are illustrative of this point: Thin Lizzy and U2. This thesis seeks to illuminate how these two bands used their platforms as popular Irish rock bands to defy norms, cross geographical and religious borders, and address the political, religious, social, and economic strife in Ireland spawned by the Troubles.

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“The times have not been good for the Irish, all the Irish or any of the Irish, the Protestants or the Catholics, the poor, the Nationalists and the Unionists, those involved and even those innocent of all but bad luck.”¹ This statement by historian and terrorism expert, J. Bowyer Bell, perfectly sums up a crisis of political, religious, social, and economic troubles in Ireland during the last three decades of the twentieth century. Beginning in the late 1960s, an era of violence and conflict broke out in Northern Ireland that lasted for three decades. Although the epicenter of this violence remained in Northern Ireland, the conflict soon spilled over into parts of the Republic as well. Also emerging in Ireland during the 1960s was a new genre of music, rock and roll, which became an outlet for bands to break barriers, defy rules, and express their sentiments about the world in which they lived. Arising in the midst of this dawn of rock and roll in Ireland were two soon-to-be-illustrious Irish rock bands: Thin Lizzy and U2. This thesis seeks briefly to explore the evolution of these bands and illuminate how each used its platform to defy rules, cross geographical and religious borders, and address the political, religious, social, and economic troubles in Ireland from the 1970s to the 1990s.

“The Troubles” in Northern Ireland were three decades of ethno-nationalist conflict that burdened vast segments of the Irish population in the late twentieth century. This ethno-nationalist clash, or low-level war as it was often classified, stemmed from centuries of British colonial rule in Ireland. Tensions between the British and the Irish intensified over time leading to a series of ill-fated uprisings and rebellions. After the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, which led to the War of Independence against the British

¹ J. Bowyer Bell, *The Irish Troubles: A Generation of Violence, 1967-1992*, First ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), xi-xii.

Crown in 1919, Ireland was officially divided by a partition in 1921, joining the six northeastern counties of Ireland to the United Kingdom and designating the remainder of the island as the Republic of Ireland. Fifty years later, the Troubles broke out in Northern Ireland, as Nationalists or Republicans fought to leave the United Kingdom and join the other twenty-six counties to become a united Ireland, while Unionists or Loyalists fought to remain within the United Kingdom. Although most of the fighting in Northern Ireland revolved around politics, the Troubles also spawned violence between the two major ethnic and religious groups in the country. The majority of the Unionists who were fighting to stay under the British government in Northern Ireland were Protestants, while the majority of the Nationalists who were fighting for reunification were Catholic.² Owing to the historical tension between Britain and Ireland, Catholic and Protestant relations were still very strained. The hate and the divide only grew deeper as the violence from the Troubles dragged on.

Emerging during this time of intensifying hostility was one of Ireland's most iconic rock bands, Thin Lizzy. Forming in Dublin in 1969, the band, composed of Phil Lynott, Brian Downey, Brian Robertson, Scott Gorham, and sometimes Gary Moore, gained international popularity as one of Ireland's first bona fide rock bands. Thin Lizzy merged many different musical styles, including blues, soul music, and traditional Irish folk music.³ They broke music barriers and "rebelliously crossed geographical, racial, and religious lines" during a time in Ireland when conflict divided these lines.⁴ The members of the band came from Protestant communities in Northern Ireland and from Catholic

² Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*. (SAGE Publications, 1997), 120.

³ "Thin Lizzy: 2020 Nominee," (Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Rock Hall, 2020, www.rockhall.com).

⁴ Ibid.

communities in the Republic of Ireland. Their front man, lead singer, and bassist, Phil Lynott, was bi-racial, making him the first “black” bona fide Irish rock star.⁵ Thin Lizzy, just by existing as a band, was a political statement, and through rock and roll, the band had an impact on Irish fans who were trying to navigate the strife and turmoil of that time.⁶

Seven years after Thin Lizzy established their roots in Dublin, four teenagers, Paul “Bono” Hewson, David “the Edge” Evans, Adam Clayton, and Larry Mullen, Jr., formed U2, and eventually became rock and roll royalty. Similar to Thin Lizzy, U2 crossed geographical and religious borders. The group gained notoriety as they addressed the political, economic, and religious problems in Northern Ireland and the Republic. Bono, U2’s front man, acquired an international reputation for his political crusades and humanitarian work. Also, similar to Thin Lizzy, U2 was composed of members from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds which they used to address the conflict in Ireland. This thesis briefly examines the deep-rooted tensions between the English and the Irish which led to the outbreak of the Troubles, as well as the way in which music from two bands in particular served to unite people, regardless of economic status, political affiliation, or religious identity.

Daniel O’Connell, one of Ireland’s most well-known political leaders of the early nineteenth century, bemoaned the rigid relationship between Ireland and England when he wrote “Accursed be the day... when invaders first touched our shores. They came to a nation famous for its love of learning, its piety, its heroism, [and]... doomed Ireland to

⁵ Graeme Thomson, *Cowboy Song: The Authorised Biography of Phil Lynott*. (London: Constable, 2016), 34.

⁶ “Thin Lizzy: 2020 Nominee.”

seven hundred centuries of oppression.”⁷ Ireland’s history, rife with complex issues and difficulties, experienced a watershed in the mid-1500s with the switch to English common law under Henry VIII who was officially named the King of Ireland.⁸ Subsequent colonization and total rule over Ireland by the English, combined with the impact of the Protestant Reformation, caused tensions between the two countries to escalate over three centuries, ultimately resulting in the Troubles.

To understand why the Troubles occurred and why it lasted for three decades, it is important to understand the long-standing struggle of the Irish after the English, specifically the English Protestant elite, took control of Ireland. Under the rule of Parliament in the early 1600s, Protestant elites were sent to the northern counties of Ireland under a system of “plantations,” in which land was taken from the Catholic inhabitants and given to Protestant settlers who had complete control of the land, as well as legal power over the Irish.⁹ This Protestant elite levied and enforced oppressive and discriminatory legislation, such as the Penal Laws, against Irish Catholics, many of whom were poor Catholics deemed disloyal to the English Parliament and suffered greatly both politically and economically.¹⁰ Catholics had their land taken from them, could not hold office, could not vote, and could not openly practice Catholicism or worship together. Although the Penal Laws were eventually removed after 134 years, discrimination against Irish Catholics continued unchecked. Oppressed and disgruntled, Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland became more and more dissatisfied with their

⁷ S. J. Connolly, *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*. 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2002), 182.

⁸ Connolly, *The Oxford Companion*, 182.

⁹ Mike Cronin, *A History of Ireland*. (Palgrave Essential Histories. Palgrave, 2001), 63-65.

¹⁰ Cronin, *A History of Ireland*, 81-86.

Protestant countrymen and resentful toward Parliament, the government that supported and empowered them.

Owing to the increased oppression and tension in Ireland, the United Irishmen, a nationalist group, staged one of the first revolts against the British in 1798, which was followed by a series of uprisings.¹¹ Heretofore typically short-lived and contained, the insurrections against the Crown finally gained more widespread support in 1916 with the “Easter Rising” in Dublin. Although ultimately a failed attempt at overthrowing the British government in Ireland, the rebellion and subsequent execution of sixteen Irish rebels, influenced many Irish men and women to join the nationalist cause against Britain during the ensuing War of Independence. Culminating in 1921, this Anglo-Irish War resulted in the partition of Ireland.¹² Six northern counties remained under British rule as part of the United Kingdom and became known as Northern Ireland. The remaining twenty-six counties became independent from Britain and eventually recognized as the Republic of Ireland.

This partition of Ireland later became the leading reason for the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Since Northern Ireland was still under the control of the British crown, the Catholics living in the six British counties, as well as many of the Irish in the Republic, were displeased with the divide. While Irish Nationalists have been around throughout the previous struggles with the British, this iteration of nationalism during the time of the Troubles called for the complete unity of the thirty-two counties of Ireland through non-violent means.¹³ These Nationalists were predominantly Catholic and largely

¹¹ Connolly, *The Oxford Companion*, 598.

¹² Connolly, *The Oxford Companion*, 455.

¹³ Ibid.

represented and led by the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP).¹⁴ More importantly, the Nationalists' main objective was to unite Ireland under a joint British and Irish government.¹⁵

Also fighting for the unification of Ireland were the Republicans. Although mostly Catholic like the Nationalists, Republicans preferred the use of violence as a means of achieving a united Ireland.¹⁶ They were composed of many political groups including the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which split into the “more right-wing, Catholic and militaristic” Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and the more Marxist Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA) in 1969.¹⁷ Sinn Féin served as the political wing of the IRA, but was most associated with the PIRA. Although both the Nationalists and the Republicans were pushing for the unification of Ireland, the Republicans and IRA took a much more extreme approach to achieving their goal--going so far as to oppose the “power-sharing settlement of 1974” and the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 set up by the British and Nationalists.¹⁸ On the opposing, or British, side of the Troubles, Unionists advocated moving away from supporting the power-sharing agreement, while Loyalists strongly pushed for the complete “integration of Northern Ireland into the United Kingdom” and opposed any power-sharing ideas or agreements.¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Paul Dixon and Eamonn O’Kane, *Northern Ireland Since 1969*. (Seminar Studies in History. Longman, 2011), 7.

¹⁶ Dixon, *Northern Ireland Since 1969*, 8.

¹⁷ Dixon, *Northern Ireland Since 1969*, 9.

¹⁸ Dixon, *Northern Ireland Since 1969*, 11.

¹⁹ Dixon, *Northern Ireland Since 1969*, 14.

Although both political and religious tensions had been present since the divide, the civil rights movement of the 1960s pushed the British government to put pressure on the Stormont government, the devolved legislature of Northern Ireland, to put in place some reforms to satisfy those fighting for civil rights.²⁰ The reforms caused conflict between the Loyalists and the Republicans, as Loyalists wanted to keep Republicans from gaining any benefits, while Republicans used the civil rights movement as an “opportunity to reopen the question of partition and campaign for a united Ireland.”²¹ Violence subsequently escalated at a fast rate in Northern Ireland, especially when civil rights protesters were attacked by the police in June 1968.²² Both sides prepared for the outbreak of even more hostility in the year ahead which, in retrospect, proved to be the start of the Troubles.

From 1969 until 1998, Northern Ireland became an increasingly dangerous place. The Irish Republican Army took up arms and used guerilla-type tactics in fighting the British and their Unionist and Loyalist supporters. Eventually the IRA, or more specifically the Provisional Irish Republican Army turned from rioting and small acts of violence to terroristic warfare against the British and their supporters.²³ The Provisional IRA specifically targeted security forces, such as the Ulster Defense Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force, British troops, the royal police force, and major commercial centers.²⁴ Loyalists as well as British troops and police responded in kind. Sadly, many innocent civilians were caught in the bloodshed. Hostilities between the two factions

²⁰ Dixon, *Northern Ireland Since 1969*, 19.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Dixon, *Northern Ireland Since 1969*, 20.

²³ Connolly, *The Oxford Companion*, 412.

²⁴ Ibid.

caused a high death toll for low-level warfare, with 25 deaths in 1970, 173 deaths in 1971, and 467 deaths in 1972.²⁵ The death toll rose to an average of 100 deaths per year from 1977 to 1993.²⁶ Although the conflict between the two sides predominantly manifested in Northern Ireland, violence from the Troubles likewise affected the Republic, (especially in those counties near the border), as well as in other parts of the United Kingdom and the United States.

While the turbulence was constant during the 1970s through the late 1990s, it was mainly confined to small affairs. Major confrontations, such as “Bloody Sunday,” did occur, however, and provide examples of how brutal the violence in Northern Ireland could be. On January 30, 1972, a civil rights march took place in Derry (Londonderry to Unionists) in Northern Ireland, even though the march had been banned.²⁷ Arranged by the Nationalists, the rally was intended to be peaceful, however it turned violent when British paratroopers, sent in to arrest rioters, killed fourteen civilians.²⁸ Only one of several “Bloody” Sundays in Ireland’s history, the events of January 30 served to heighten tensions and increase aggression between the two sides.²⁹ This rapid escalation of conflict in 1972 led to direct rule of Northern Ireland by the British government in Westminster.³⁰ This direct rule angered the Republicans especially, and although attempts were made to reach an agreement between Ireland and England in the mid-1980s, no

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Connolly, *The Oxford Companion*, 51.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Violent incidents between the British and Irish Nationalists in 1887, 1920, and 1921 were also called “Bloody Sunday.”

³⁰ Connolly, *The Oxford Companion*, 158.

peace agreements could be arranged. Violence between the two sides continued through the 1980s and for most of the 1990s.

In 1993, the Nationalists and the Republicans joined together to craft a Nationalist-based agreement through negotiations between the Social Democratic and Labour Party and Sinn Féin.³¹ Following these negotiations, the British and Irish prime ministers signed the Downing Street Declaration on December 15, 1993, opening the peace process. In 1994, the IRA, as well as the Ulster Defense Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force, all signed ceasefires. Plans emerged to appease the Catholic Irish and the Ulster Protestants through cross-border collaboration.³² Additionally, strategies for power-sharing between the two leading political parties, as well as Sinn Féin, were created in a type of agreement between Dublin and London in hopes of ending the Troubles.³³ Loyalists, however, were reluctant to make any deals with the IRA until they had been mostly disarmed. The impatient IRA ended the ceasefire with a bombing in London in February 1996, with smaller incidents to follow.³⁴ In 1997, the IRA signed a new ceasefire, and plans for peace continued as before. The Good Friday Agreement, signed on April 10, 1998, accepted the plans for peace, and the Troubles officially ended. The violence did not dissolve immediately, but did cease shortly thereafter. Overall, the Troubles in Northern Ireland resulted in a violent three decades and highlighted the religious, economic, and social oppressions that many Irish had to face in the last half of the twentieth century.

³¹ Connolly, *The Oxford Companion*, 459.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Connolly, *The Oxford Companion*, 459-60.

The Troubles had many consequences in Ireland, and while violence was rampant in the streets, music served as an escape from the strife that was afflicting the island.

While the 1960s marked the beginning of the Troubles, the 1960s in Ireland also marked the emergence of rock and roll, largely as a result of the British influence on rock and pop music on both sides of the Atlantic. Although the genres of rock and pop were making their debut, Ireland's music scene was dominated by showbands—dance bands made up of six to seven professional musicians and performers. Showbands, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, were really the only way that musicians in Ireland could make a living from performing. These bands, however, typically played covers and lacked originality, thus opening the door (for those who were interested) to new sounds epitomized by pop and rock and roll. The popularity and influence of rock music in Ireland produced Thin Lizzy, a band that would eventually become internationally renowned.

Considered one of Ireland's first "Irish" rock bands, Thin Lizzy's very existence was a cultural, religious, and geographical bridge during the Troubles. Although Thin Lizzy would see a multitude of changes in membership from its formation in 1969 to its disbandment in August 1983, the original and most long-standing members came from very different places and religious backgrounds during a time when Ireland was cut so deeply. Formed in Dublin and spending most of their time in the Republic and England during the two decades of their existence, the members of the band were clearly affected by the Troubles. At times a little more reluctant to directly address political or religious issues than later rock bands, such as U2 or The Boomtown Rats, the band nevertheless used their platform to occasionally take advantage of the political, social, religious, and economic issues of the times.

The founding members of Thin Lizzy were lead vocalist and bass player, Philip “Phil” Lynott, drummer, Brian Downey, lead guitarist, Eric Bell, and keyboard player, Eric Wrixon. As such, Thin Lizzy served from its outset as a bridge between the two geographical, political, and religious divisions. Phil Lynott and Brian Downey were both from the Crumlin area in Dublin, which was deeply Catholic at the time, as was characteristic of most of the Republic of Ireland.³⁵ Both Downey and Lynott attended the Catholic Scoil Colm Christian Brothers’ School, which impressed upon both boys a view of an oppressed Catholic Ireland fighting against the British.³⁶ Eric Bell and Eric Wrixon were Belfast natives.³⁷ Bell was raised in a mostly Protestant neighborhood in Woodstock Road in Northern Ireland’s capital city.³⁸ Wrixon was only in Thin Lizzy for a short time—before the band gained any fame, however Bell became a core member. This trio of Lynott, Downey, and Bell, the “first” Thin Lizzy, overcame the politics that separated the two Irelands by rising above any religious divisions and their associated political ideologies.

When the original trio dissolved after the exit of Eric Bell in 1973, Lynott and Downey asked Gary Moore, who was an earlier bandmate of Lynott’s in Skid Row, to join Thin Lizzy as the new lead guitarist. Moore was also a native of Belfast, thus publicly further bridging the divisions caused by the Troubles. Although Moore did not stay in Thin Lizzy for long after his initial stint with the band, Moore would later join Thin Lizzy two more times during the “Golden Age” of the band, which also included

³⁵ Thomson, *Cowboy Song* 35; Scott Gorham and Harry Doherty, *Thin Lizzy: The Boys Are Back in Town*. (London: Omnibus, 2012), 52.

³⁶ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 42.

³⁷ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 142.

³⁸ Alex McGreevy, “Interview: Remembering Thin Lizzy with guitar legend Eric Bell.” Slabber.net. December 8, 2019.

Scottish guitarist, Brian Robertson, and American twin-lead guitarist, Scott Gorham.

After Thin Lizzy's disbandment in 1983, Lynott and Moore continued working closely together to produce their songs.

Thin Lizzy's very composition not only breached geographical and religious boundaries, it also broke expected racial norms. Race relations played a critical role in the civil rights movement of the 1960s--a major catalyst for the Troubles. Phil Lynott, Thin Lizzy's front man, was bi-racial at a time when there were "few people of color in Ireland."³⁹ According to the band's manager, Ted Carroll, "there were so few black people in Ireland that there wasn't really that overt racism you would have in England," but Lynott, and even his Caucasian mother, Philomena, nevertheless experienced racism to some degree.⁴⁰ Lynott's race got him attention, whether it was negative commentary or simply the sheer public surprise at seeing a "black Irishman."⁴¹ He learned to use this notoriety to his advantage, much like the Irish who felt like outsiders identified with "blacks."⁴²

Phil Lynott's race was not only significant because it afforded him status as Ireland's first black bona fide rock star, but also because the band as a whole was able to become a sort of racial link, especially in relation to the Troubles. The Catholic Irish, as well as some poorer Irish Protestants in Northern Ireland who were oppressed and discriminated against by the British and the elite Protestants, saw many similarities between their experiences and those of African Americans in the United States South.⁴³

³⁹ Gorham, *Thin Lizzy*, 30.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Gorham, *Thin Lizzy*, 24, 30, 32, 40.

⁴² Gorham, *Thin Lizzy*, 40. Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 11.

⁴³ Brian Dooley, "Black and Green: The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland and Black America and Accompanying Critical Analysis," (January 1, 2018), 1, 37.

The Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland really became the leaders in fighting for basic human rights, reforms, and most importantly, voting rights for the mistreated Irish groups. These civil rights activists in Northern Ireland modeled many of their rallies on African American protests—especially marches.⁴⁴ Some Catholic activists saw so many similarities between their plight and that of African Americans that they called themselves “Ulster’s White Negroes.”⁴⁵

Much like these activists, Lynott used his color and the idea of the Irish as “blacks,” or outsiders, to his benefit.⁴⁶ For example, many of Thin Lizzy’s songs, written by Lynott, have race as a central focus or at least mention race in some way. The song “Black Boys on the Corner” is a statement by Lynott about being black.⁴⁷ The lyrics include

*One of the black boys said
“I’m a giving a warning”
“People been putting me down”
“I’m so tired I’m yawning,”*⁴⁸

The song relates the discrimination that Lynott and other people of color experienced, and, likewise, how the downtrodden Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland were feeling during this time. In this same song, Lynott sings “*I’m a little black boy, it’s no disgrace,*” which reveals Lynott’s pride at being black. It is also a reference to Roddy Doyle’s *The Commitments* and the idea of “the Irish being the blacks of Europe,” and being “black and proud.”⁴⁹ Thus, Lynott’s presence in the band not only personified racial tolerance,

⁴⁴ Dooley, “Black and Green,” Chap. 3, 49-68.

⁴⁵ Dooley, “Black and Green,” 37.

⁴⁶ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 11.

⁴⁷ Gorham, *Thin Lizzy*, 32.

⁴⁸ Thin Lizzy. “Black Boys on the Corner.” Recorded ca. 1977. Track 7 on *Thin Lizzy*. London Records, vinyl LP.

⁴⁹ Richard Sax, “The Commitments by Roddy Doyle.” (Salem Press Encyclopedia of Literature, 2019).

but his lyrics strike at the heart of racial injustice toward people of color in particular and, metaphorically, the poor and oppressed Irish in the ongoing struggle in the North.

Thin Lizzy used their platform as a band in other ways to address the issues that were steering the Troubles. In school, Lynott and Downey were the recipients of a very romanticized and Nationalistic education.⁵⁰ Former students who attended the Christian Brothers' School at the same times as Lynott and Downey stated that the students "were indoctrinated" by the Christian Brothers.⁵¹ The school strongly supported Irish nationalism and the creation of a "truly 'Irish Ireland,'" and focused most of the students' studies on the idea that "English rule was evil, and the Irish were the heroes for breaking free from that."⁵² This interpretation of Irish history and the current political order had a great impact on Lynott who, then, used Thin Lizzy's songs to address these issues.⁵³ For example, one of the band's early songs, "Eire" (1971), portrays the heroic Irish struggle against the English. While the first half of the song describes the Viking invasions in 1014, the last half highlights the Irish heroism of Red O'Donnell and Hugh O'Neill, both of whom fought in the Nine Years War against the English.⁵⁴

*Stands Red O'Donnell
Fighting the Saxon foe
With Hugh O'Neil
Oh
All along the north land
They fight bitterly
The land is Eireann
The land is free⁵⁵*

⁵⁰ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 37.

⁵¹ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 36.

⁵² Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 41-42.

⁵³ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 42.

⁵⁴ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 45.

⁵⁵ Thin Lizzy. "Eire." Recorded January 1971. Track 6 on *Thin Lizzy*. London Records, vinyl LP.

While pointing out the Irish heroism against the English in the 1500s, Lynott clearly was aware of the connection to the fighting in Northern Ireland that had just recently broken out. Likewise, the song “Emerald” (1976) embraces the same heroic tales from a historic Ireland. Yet with lyrics like “overthrow the overlords” and “near the border, there were many more to die” the song relates to the current violence in Northern Ireland, as the IRA were attempting to get rid of the Saxon (British) government.⁵⁶

“Soldier of Fortune” (1977) is another song by Thin Lizzy that highlights war and violence, with lyrics such as

*A soldier of fortune came home from war
And wondered what he was fighting for
This sad-eyed soldier, he broke down and cried
Oh oh, he was so broke up inside*

*When will it end
When will it end
The bell tolls
For those about to die.*⁵⁷

Lynott was a student of Irish history, and this composition could have been just another song highlighting any one of Ireland’s major battles over the course of time. However, “Soldier of Fortune” plays on the current situation in Northern Ireland and its border where many men took up arms against their own neighbors. The eerie lines “when will it end, the bell tolls, for those about to die” clearly refer to the ongoing violence of the Troubles, ongoing for almost a decade prior to this song’s release. With the highest death rate occurring in the 1970s, the lyrics directly confront all of the lives lost and to be lost in the coming years if the Troubles did not end.

⁵⁶ Thin Lizzy. “Emerald.” Recorded December 1975 to February 1976. Track 9 on *Jailbreak*. Warner Bros. Records Inc., vinyl LP.

⁵⁷ Thin Lizzy. “Soldier of Fortune.” Recorded ca. 1977. Track 1 on *Bad Reputation*. Vertigo, vinyl LP.

“Róisín Dubh (Black Rose): A Rock Legend” (1979) is a song that, once again, captures the Irish “legends from long ago.”⁵⁸ The “Róisín Dubh,” Gaelic for “black rose”, is a “Nationalist symbol of resistance dating back to the sixteenth century.”⁵⁹ In an interview not long after the album, *Róisín Dubh (Black Rose): A Rock Legend*, was released, Lynott explained that the name “black rose” or “dark rose” was “a name they had for Ireland in the old days during the troubles” and Irish resistance.⁶⁰ Historical relevance notwithstanding, the name, “Black Rose”, was deeply relevant to the Troubles, a perfect statement for its time.

After Thin Lizzy’s official break up with the departure of Gorham and Downey in 1983, Lynott and Moore stayed close, as Lynott still had hopes for producing music. He felt that there was no need to keep Thin Lizzy going since the golden quartet of Lynott, Downey, Gorham, Robertson, and sometimes Moore was no more. With Moore, Lynott wrote the song “Military Man” in 1985, which is very much a soldier’s song.⁶¹ The lyrics tell a story about a military man who does not know what he is fighting for, though he is trained to kill. He misses home and observes that the blood is “ankle-deep.”⁶² The song was released as the B-side to the single “Out in the Fields,” written by Moore. In “Out in the Fields,” Moore directly speaks about the Troubles affecting his homeland.⁶³ This anti-

⁵⁸ Thin Lizzy. “Róisín Dubh (Black Rose): A Rock Legend.” Recorded December 1978 to February 1979. Track 9 on *Black Rose: A Rock Legend*. Warner Bros. Records Inc., vinyl LP.

⁵⁹ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 46.

⁶⁰ Hank Shteamer, “Flashback: Thin Lizzy Rock for Irish Pride on ‘Roisin Dubh,’” *Rolling Stone* (Rolling Stone, July 1, 2019), <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/thin-lizzy-roisin-dubh-black-rose-live-821279/>.

⁶¹ Gary Moore, and Philip Lynott. “Military Man.” Recorded ca. 1985. Track 3 on *Run for Cover*. 10 Records, vinyl LP.

⁶² Moore, “Military Man.”

⁶³ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 497.

war song highlights the problems accompanying the decades-old violence with no end in sight.

*It doesn't matter if you're wrong or if you're right
It makes no difference if you're black or if you're white
All men are equal till the victory is one
No color or religion ever stopped a bullet from a gun*

*Out in the fields, the fighting has begun
Out on the streets, they're falling one by one
Out from the skies, a thousand more will die each day
Death is just a heartbeat away.⁶⁴*

Not only did Lynott and Moore publish these songs in 1985, they also decided to wear traditional red military-style jackets in the accompanying video and for the cover of the singles.⁶⁵ Subsequently, Lynott and Moore made an even more bold and direct statement about the horrors of warfare in the streets of Ireland by wearing the same red attire during their performances.

Still, Lynott and Thin Lizzy were not an overtly political band, especially when it came to the Troubles. For example, when the issue came up in interviews, Lynott would try to answer with dull and shallow responses, such as “I’d like Ireland to become one nation, but then, we are. We seem to be all Irish when we’re away from Ireland.”⁶⁶ Lynott had a romanticized view of Ireland, an Ireland that was based mostly on heroic tales of struggles and resistance against the British. This is likely why, when it did come down to supporting one side over the other, Lynott chose Irish nationalism. By default, he supported the IRA by including statements like “Smash H Block” on the back of the

⁶⁴ Gary Moore, and Philip Lynott. “Out In The Fields.” Recorded November 1984. Track 5 on *Run for Cover*. 10 Records, vinyl LP.

⁶⁵ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 497.

⁶⁶ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 197.

Chinatown cover in support of the hunger strikers in Northern Ireland.⁶⁷ During a television interview after the release of “Out in the Fields” and “Military Man” with Gary Moore, “Gaz Top told Lynott ‘At last you’ve come out and said something,’ in which Lynott replied, ‘What do you mean, *at last*? I’ve been saying things all me bleedin’ life.’”⁶⁸

In a way, Lynott and Thin Lizzy used their platform as a band to confront the deep divisions in Ireland, as well as the social and economic issues associated with them. Lynott and his closest musicians, in the words of journalist Graeme Thomson, were “questioning the orthodoxies of the time with every show they played, every song they wrote.”⁶⁹ At a time when Ireland was in shambles politically, religiously, and economically, music was a distraction, and the emergence of prominent bands and musicians such as Thin Lizzy helped to facilitate that escape.

While Thin Lizzy may have been slowly fading into the background in the mid-1980s, U2 had surely passed them in becoming Ireland’s most iconic rock band. Yet it was Thin Lizzy’s *Live and Dangerous* album that had influenced the young members of U2 and helped them find their sound and brand.⁷⁰ Although U2 experienced some struggles as they were starting out, as most bands do, the members were determined to become the biggest rock band in the world. After a short time, U2 soared to success and, with their hit album *The Joshua Tree*, U2 “‘became the number-one rock group.’”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 198.

⁶⁸ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 497. (Music Box TV Interview on June 11, 1985).

⁶⁹ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 136.

⁷⁰ Linda Brusasco, dir. BBC FOUR Legends, Episode 3, “Thin Lizzy: Bad Reputation.” (Aired 21-23 January 2011, in broadcast syndication. BBC, Televised Documentary). 00:41:19.

⁷¹ John Jobling, *U2: The Definitive Biography*. (New York, NY: St. Marlin Press, 2014), 235. *The Joshua Tree* reached number one on American Charts in its fourth week of being released. However, *The Joshua Tree* was the album that not only made U2 increasingly famous, but also made listeners concur that U2 had the potential to be regarded as the number one rock group of that time.

Beyond their music, U2 was known for their engagement in politics and activism, which only led to greater popularity across the world. Critics, however, argued that their efforts were more of a corporate scheme.⁷² Nevertheless, much like Thin Lizzy, U2's notoriety allowed them to serve as a political, geographical, religious, and social bridge during the time of Troubles.⁷³

Although U2 has always been considered an Irish band, some of the members were not originally from Ireland. The drummer, Lawrence "Larry" Joseph Mullen, was born on the north side of Dublin, making him one of two members of U2 to be a native.⁷⁴ Bassist Adam Charles Clayton was born in Oxfordshire, England, and moved with his family to Malahide, a town near Dublin, around the age of four or five.⁷⁵ Lead guitarist David "the Edge" Howell Evans was born in East London, although his parents were Welsh.⁷⁶ Evans, along with his family, moved to Malahide when he was almost one.⁷⁷ His brother, Richard "Dik" Evans also joined his brother under an earlier incarnation of the band, but left shortly after the formation of the final version of U2.⁷⁸ Lead singer Paul "Bono" David Hewson was the second member of U2 to be an Irish native. Born in Dublin, Bono would eventually become not only the leader of the band, but also the most active in regard to global activism and politics.⁷⁹ Similar to Thin Lizzy, half of U2 hailed from Dublin, Ireland, yet, unlike Thin Lizzy, the other half of the band were not from

⁷² Jobling, *U2*, 9.

⁷³ Jobling, *U2*, 234.

⁷⁴ Jobling, *U2*, 13.

⁷⁵ Jobling, *U2*, 17.

⁷⁶ Jobling, *U2*, 21.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Timothy D. Neufeld, *U2: Rock 'N' Roll to Change the World*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 11.

⁷⁹ Jobling, *U2*, 23.

Northern Ireland, they were from England. While all the boys ended up in Dublin at a young age and grew up in Dublin together, their very origin suggests that U2 was a band that overcame any geographical divide and the concomitant hatred between the British and the Irish.

Living in a country in which there were only 125,000 Protestants out of a population of three million, the members of U2, likewise, served as a representation of religious toleration during the Troubles.⁸⁰ Their background and their understanding of the religious divisions that were tearing Ireland apart greatly influenced not only their faiths, but also their music and participation in global activism. For example, Larry and Bono were born in Dublin, which was majority Catholic at the time, and the Edge and Adam were from England, a predominantly Protestant country. Although the influences of Catholicism and Protestantism were substantial in the regions where they were born, all of the boys ended up attending Mount Temple in Dublin. Mount Temple was the “first co-educational, multi-denominational school” in Dublin, even though the school was under Protestant management.⁸¹ Unlike many of the other schools in Ireland, and in particular Catholic-dominated Dublin, Mount Temple was free of the strong Catholic restrictions and promoted “expression and individuality.”⁸² The school allowed the boys to experiment not only with religion, but with their individuality as well, which had a major impact on the band’s future music and platform.

⁸⁰ Alan McPherson, *The World and U2: One Band’s Remaking of Global Activism*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 27.

⁸¹ Jobling, *U2*, 15.

⁸² Ibid.

To add further context to the band's perspective on religion, Bono's parents were in what was considered a "rare mixed marriage" in Ireland.⁸³ Bono's father was Catholic and his mother was Protestant, a combination frowned upon by both faith traditions at the time.⁸⁴ Instead of one of his parents converting after their marriage, his father still attended Catholic Mass, while Bono, his mother, and his brother attended a Protestant Church, making Bono more Protestant than Catholic.⁸⁵ The religious mix in his family had a significant effect on Bono, as it made him aware of the schisms dividing Ireland. Bono expressed his feelings towards this rift between Protestants and Catholics as "petty and hateful," and he really developed a contempt for religious segregation from his experience in a mixed-faith family.⁸⁶

Mount Temple allowed the boys to decide their own religious practices, freeing them from strict Catholicism or Protestantism. Larry, the Edge, and Bono tended toward more Protestant ways at first, which often resulted in them being cat-called and targeted by religious factions such as the Black Catholics.⁸⁷ U2 was often referred to as "dirty, stuck-up Proddies" and labelled a middle-class Protestant band during their formative years.⁸⁸

U2 embraced Christianity early on and eventually joined Shalom, a "Charismatic Christian sect devoted to surrendering their egos and material desires before the healing grace and fiery breath of the Holy Spirit."⁸⁹ With the exception of Adam, who tended not

⁸³ McPherson, *The World and U2*, 27.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ McPherson, *The World and U2*, 27-8.

⁸⁶ McPherson, *The World and U2*, 28-32.

⁸⁷ Jobling, *U2*, 61-2.

⁸⁸ Ibid. The conflict with groups such as the Black Catholics may have been overexaggerated by U2.

⁸⁹ Jobling, *U2*, 63.

to be religious, Larry, the Edge, and Bono became members of the Shalom sect and became born-again Christians. While the three had strong faith before joining, Shalom offered an escape from the division between Protestantism and Catholicism, and it also created a new fire of faith within the three that ultimately influenced their involvement with missionary work and activism. Membership in Shalom affected U2's early music. For example, according to Bono, the album name "October" was influenced by his experiences as a member in Shalom, in which he felt that "the early 1980's were a dark era."⁹⁰

During the band's early years, three-fourths of U2 were committed Christians "disgusted by youthful rebellion and rock-and-roll hedonism."⁹¹ With Bono as their front man and leader early on, the members of U2, with the exception of Adam, promoted their Christianity and expressed their faith through their music. Music promoter Jerry Mickelson observed that "Going to a U2 show was a religious experience," and many others agreed.⁹² Bono would often claim "This is Church!" during their shows.⁹³ The influence of Christianity served as a catalyst for the band's role in humanitarian work and global activism through mission work. According to Bono, Shalom was the trigger that led him to become a "full time instead of part-time activist."⁹⁴

Although Shalom and religion made U2 into the band that they are today, it almost led to the end of U2 before they really reached the top. Adam, who embraced the hard core rock and roll lifestyle, worried that the band was becoming too Christian,

⁹⁰ McPherson, *The World and U2*, 33.

⁹¹ Jobling, *U2*, 106.

⁹² Jobling, *U2*, 116.

⁹³ McPherson, *The World and U2*, 19.

⁹⁴ McPherson, *The World and U2*, 33.

forcing Larry, the Edge, and Bono eventually to choose between their music and Shalom.⁹⁵ Other members of Shalom were trying to get U2 to give up their band and music, as their “rock and roll ways were godless.”⁹⁶ However, the three came to the conclusion that they should not have to give up their music and band in order to remain religious and to spread Christianity. According to Bono, although the band did not write explicitly religious lyrics, their music still served as a way of worship.⁹⁷ The three left Shalom and, along with Adam, continued working together as U2--more determined than ever to be a phenomenal rock band.

The Troubles were not felt as much in places like Dublin, but U2 was profoundly aware of the violence occurring in Northern Ireland. When asked about growing up in Dublin, the members admitted that the Troubles did have an “undertone to the way of life in Dublin” and served as a kind of “backdrop to [their] life.”⁹⁸ However, an incident on May 17, 1974, brought the brutality and bloodshed to the forefront of their experience. Multiple car bombings in Dublin that day resulted in the death of thirty-three people. Bono later described the incident on the liner notes of U2’s album *Songs of Innocence* (2014), stating that he “rode [his] bike to school that day and dodged one of the bloodiest moments in a history that divided an island.”⁹⁹ Bono also stated in the liner that the song “Raised by Wolves” is about those bombings, but it is written from his friend Andy Rowen’s prospective, who saw the aftermath of the explosion from his family’s van with his dad.¹⁰⁰ Bono felt that Rowen never really got over the incident which left the people

⁹⁵ Jobling, *U2*, 121.

⁹⁶ McPherson, *The World and U2*, 33.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ McPherson, *The World and U2*, 29.

⁹⁹ Neufeld, *U2*, 40.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

of Dublin deeply traumatized.¹⁰¹ The lyrics of the song “Raised by Wolves” are very poignant as they describe the insurmountable loss of life that day in Dublin.

*Face down on a broken street
There's a man in the corner
In a pool of misery
I'm in a white van
As a red sea covers the ground*

*Metal crash, I can't tell what it is
But I take a look, and now I'm sorry I did
5:30 on a Friday night
Thirty-three good people cut down.¹⁰²*

With this song, U2 put the Troubles into a personal perspective for their fans by shedding light on how devastating the Troubles, even affecting areas that were not close to Northern Ireland.

The album, *Songs of Innocence*, also features the song “The Troubles.” The lyrics address domestic violence and abuse.

*You think it's easier
To put your finger on the trouble
When the trouble is you
And you think it's easier
To know your own tricks
Well it's the hardest thing you'll ever do*

*I have a will for survival
So you can hurt me and then hurt me some more
I can live with denial
But you're not my troubles anymore.¹⁰³*

The song implies that someone affected by domestic abuse has overcome that violence by breaking free from the abuser. The title “The Troubles”, however, suggests that the band is really making a statement not only about domestic abuse within families, but also connecting this idea to domestic violence in Ireland.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² U2. “Raised by Wolves.” Recorded ca. 2009-2014. Track 7 on *Songs of Innocence*. Island, CD.

¹⁰³ U2. “The Troubles.” Recorded ca. 2009-2014. Track 11 on *Songs of Innocence*. Island, CD.

As U2 developed more of a political agenda, they wrote other songs addressing the Troubles. “Peace on Earth” (2000) is a direct response to the Omagh bombing in Northern Ireland on August 1, 1998.¹⁰⁴ This was an IRA attack, which resulted in the death of twenty-nine people. According to Bono, the Omagh bombing was “the lowest day of [his] life, outside of personal losses,” and feared that it would end the Peace Process.¹⁰⁵ The lyrics reveal Bono’s dismay with the actions of the IRA and bitterness with the ongoing Troubles.

*Heaven on earth
We need it now
I'm sick of all of this
Hanging around
Sick of sorrow
Sick of pain
Sick of hearing again and again
That there's gonna be
Peace on earth¹⁰⁶*

Sean, Julia, Gareth, Ann and Brenda—some of the victims killed in the Omagh bombings—are specifically mentioned in the lyrics. By this time, the Troubles had been rampant in Ireland for three decades and the violence was taking a toll.

“Please” (1997) is another U2 song that refers to the Troubles, although the lyrics do not directly name any victims or specific events. The lyrics conjure images of violence in the streets, common in Northern Ireland during this time. The warring factions in Northern Ireland were so reluctant to start peace talks, and the more radical groups like the IRA were strongly opposed to compromise.

*September
Streets capsizing
Spilling over*

¹⁰⁴ Niall Stokes, *U2: The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*. (Carlton Books Limited, 1997), 156-7.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ U2. “Peace on Earth.” Recorded ca. 1998. Track 8 on *All That You Can't Leave Behind*. Island, CD.

*Down the drain
 Shards of glass splinters like rain
 But you could only feel
 Your own pain
 October
 Talking getting nowhere
 November
 December
 Remember
 Are we just starting again¹⁰⁷*

The line “talking getting nowhere” and the passing of time indicated by naming the months reflects dismay with failed peace talks and the prolongation of the Troubles. The song was released as a single for U2’s album *Pop*, and the cover for the single had pictures of Gerry Adams, David Trimble, Ian Paisley, and John Hume, all of whom played a role in the peace negotiations.¹⁰⁸ This was a bold statement for it directly confronts these politicians and their failure to get the Troubles resolved quickly.

The most popular song by U2 that addresses the Troubles is “Sunday Bloody Sunday” (1983). On January 30, 1972, British troops shot twenty-six civilians during a protest march in Derry, and out of those twenty-six, fourteen were killed. This incident only deepened the division between the Loyalists and Unionists, and the Nationalists and the Republicans, as well as between the Protestants and Catholics.¹⁰⁹ The lyrics are the most political and anti-war ever written and performed by U2.

*And the battle's just begun
 There's many lost, but tell me who has won?
 The trenches dug within our hearts
 And mothers, children, brothers, sisters torn apart*

*Sunday, Bloody Sunday
 Sunday, Bloody Sunday*

How long, how long must we sing this song?

¹⁰⁷ U2. “Please.” Recorded ca. 1995-1996. Track 11 on *Pop*. Island, CD.

¹⁰⁸ U2. *Pop*. Recorded ca. 1995-1996. Island, CD.

¹⁰⁹ Dixon, *Northern Ireland Since 1969*, 30.

*How long? How long?*¹¹⁰

During live shows Bono clutched a white flag and waved it around as he sang. “Sunday Bloody Sunday” became not only U2’s most “anti-violence anthem,” but also the “defining image” of the band.¹¹¹

U2 also used their platform to confront and bring attention to many other global issues, such as poverty, the Polish Solidarity movement, and the threat of nuclear war, and they performed at many charity events, such as Live Aid.¹¹² However, as an Irish band, their response to the Troubles in Ireland stands out from the rest because they used their platform to promote a resolution to the Troubles through peace and non-violence. The most significant demonstration of their political influence was the band’s participation in and support of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. In hopes of inspiring enough voters to support the peace agreement, U2 performed in Belfast on May 19, 1998, at the request of Nationalist campaigners.¹¹³ At this show, U2 proved themselves to be the “living examples of Irish unity”¹¹⁴ During the concert, Bono brought the Unionist David Trimble and the Nationalist John Hume on stage together and “raised their arms skyward to the roar of the crowd.”¹¹⁵ This very image of Bono bringing together the two opposing sides was a powerful moment in which U2 served as a literal bridge between the political and religious divisions characteristic of the Troubles.

The last three decades of the twentieth century were traumatic in Ireland. Northern Ireland was essentially a war zone since the Troubles began in the late 1960s.

¹¹⁰ U2. “Sunday Bloody Sunday.” Recorded ca. 1982. Track 1 on *War*. Island, vinyl LP.

¹¹¹ Jobling, *U2*, 154.

¹¹² Jobling, *U2*, 138.

¹¹³ McPherson, *The World and U2*, 71.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

The 1970s, 1980s and 1990s were marred by ongoing violence and death as well as an unsuccessful struggle for peace. Although most of the conflict and violence was centered in Northern Ireland, especially in places like Belfast and along the border, the violence still reached elsewhere including Dublin, London, and the United States. Eventually the Troubles became, in the words of U2 guitarist the Edge, “a backdrop to the way of life” in the Republic of Ireland as a whole.¹¹⁶ In addition to dealing with the political and religious war in the North, Ireland as a whole experienced social problems like poverty, unemployment, and emigration, as well as repression from the strict and powerful Catholic Church in the Republic. Music not only served as an escape from these difficulties, but also as a kind of cultural community that overcame barriers and allowed fans of music to come together, regardless of class, religion, or political differences, and enjoy shows. With the emergence of rock and roll in Ireland in the 1960s, Thin Lizzy rose in popularity to become a very well-loved Irish rock band. They also influenced other young musicians in Ireland, particularly a new young band in Dublin, calling themselves U2.

While there have been many prominent rock, pop, and punk bands to come out of Ireland, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, Thin Lizzy and U2 were the most iconic and influential, with U2 turning out to be a worldwide sensation during the peak of their popularity. More importantly, the way in which these bands used their notoriety to address the social, religious, and economic divisions created by the Troubles, made Thin Lizzy and U2 a sort of cultural bridge in a grim and tumultuous Irish landscape.

¹¹⁶ McPherson, *The World and U2*, 29.

While the members of both Thin Lizzy and U2 represented religious tolerance between Protestants and Catholics, the two front men dealt with religion in differing ways. For Thin Lizzy, religion was not a major theme in their music. In fact, the band constantly challenged the norms of the ruling Catholic Church during the 1970s. Lynott, for example, would often ask during shows if the female fans would “like a little more Irish in them.”¹¹⁷ Lynott viewed Catholicism as “a basic set of ground rules that are really important,” but also as a set of rules to break.¹¹⁸

U2, on the other hand, made religion a major part of the band’s identity. While Thin Lizzy challenged the religious conservatism of Ireland by embracing drugs and sex, U2, with the exception of Adam, did the opposite. While Thin Lizzy had members that were from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, it was U2 who used their amalgam of Christian faiths to actively promote peace between the warring religious sects in Ireland. Religion became a dominant theme in much of U2’s music and ultimately drove them to engage in activism.

Another area of contrast between Thin Lizzy and U2 is in how each regarded violence. With the Troubles escalating in Northern Ireland, exposure to violence, even if indirectly, was a reality for most teens. Thin Lizzy found that their fans, consisting mostly of teenagers, loved the excitement of violence and fighting. So the band incorporated fighting on stage, making it seem unplanned and not a performance, leading their crowds to go wild. The band even incorporated violence into an album appropriately named *Fighting*.¹¹⁹ For the cover, Lynott, Gorham, Robertson, and Downey posed in an

¹¹⁷ Brusasco, “Thin Lizzy,” 00:00:08.

¹¹⁸ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 43.

¹¹⁹ Thin Lizzy. *Fighting*. Recorded May 1975. Vertigo, vinyl LP.

alley brandishing weapons (although the intended cover was to be a photo of the members bloodied and bruised up).¹²⁰ Furthermore, many of Thin Lizzy's songs romanticized mythological and historical battles from Ireland's past. Although Thin Lizzy did use some of their songs to speak out about the Troubles, the band acquiesced to the demands of their gaining popularity and success by embracing the associated violence endorsed by their fans.

U2, however, very quickly made their support for nonviolence and opposition to war widely known to their fans. Through many of their songs, U2 exhibit grief about the Troubles. They wrote songs urging peace between the warring factions in Ireland and incorporated symbols like a white flag at their live performances which made their statement for peace even more poignant and bold.¹²¹ The band became steadfast supporters of the Peace Process in Ireland, as well as the Good Friday Agreement. Bono even stated that he liked to believe that U2's concert and his photo with Hume and Trimble influenced some people to ratify the peace agreement.¹²² Even at U2 concerts, violence of any sort was not tolerated, to the point that Bono would stop a show if fighting broke out in the audience.¹²³

One of the biggest differences between Thin Lizzy and U2 was that the members of Thin Lizzy were not involved in global activism, whereas that cause became U2's very brand. Thin Lizzy was never explicitly political. Their songs that addressed the Troubles

¹²⁰ Gorham, *Thin Lizzy*, 61.

¹²¹ McPherson, *The World and U2*, 41.

¹²² McPherson, *The World and U2*, 71.

¹²³ McPherson, *The World and U2*, 41. Although U2 was committed to nonviolence, there were a few contradictions to this position such as an incident during a show in Connecticut when Bono charged Larry and threw his equipment off the stage and into the crowd and the Edge responded by punching Bono on stage.

or the divisions between the Irish and the British, promoted the idea of Irishness over unity. While Lynott did state that he wanted a united Ireland, he often supported Irish nationalism. His romanticized view of Irish nationalism leaned toward promoting the Provisional IRA and their hunger strikes. Furthermore, during activist events such as Live Aid, Lynott's worsening health condition and struggle with drugs led to his exclusion by Midge Ure and Bob Geldof and any possibility of Thin Lizzy reforming for this benefit concert.¹²⁴

U2 had a very negative view of the IRA. Bono, unlike Lynott, did not entertain a romanticized view about the organization and publicly stated that he did not support the revolution. When U2 performed on the same day as an IRA bombing that killed eleven people in Enniskillen, the band made their feelings towards the IRA even more explicit during a particularly heartfelt performance of "Sunday Bloody Sunday."¹²⁵ Bono was tired of hearing Irish Americans who had not been to Ireland in years talking about the glory of the revolution led by the IRA.¹²⁶ U2 even went so far as to pull out of a Saint Patrick's Day parade in New York City, after learning that the theme of the event was "England Get Out of Ireland."¹²⁷

Irish culture and music during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s was greatly affected by the Troubles in Northern Ireland. The violence made it dangerous for bands to perform in places such as Belfast, especially after incidents such as the Miami Showband

¹²⁴ Thomson, *Cowboy Song*, 505. Midge Ure explains that neither he nor Bob Geldof "even thought about asking Phil to put Lizzy together for Live Aid. It is also suspected that Bob Geldof "made a conscious decision not to involve Phil" in Live Aid, likely out of fear that he would not perform well due to his health.

¹²⁵ Jobling, *U2*, 255.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Jobling, *U2*, 128.

Massacre, in which three members of the popular showband were killed by gunmen from the Ulster Volunteer Force.¹²⁸ Many bands, Irish as well as other nationalities, avoided touring in Northern Ireland owing to the potential danger. Thin Lizzy and U2 represent a handful of bands that took exception to this rule, performing in Belfast on many occasions. A few other artists, such as Rory Gallagher, were determined to tour in Northern Ireland, but they were rare. Irish bands and artists also became increasingly frustrated and angry with the situation. Thin Lizzy and U2 were not unique in their efforts to address the divisions created by the Troubles. The Boomtown Rats used their status as a band to speak out about the political issues in Ireland. Bob Geldof, the front man for The Boomtown Rats, was following in the footsteps of Bono in his embrace of political activism when he organized Live Aid. Sinéad O'Connor was also an openly political artist. One of her most well-known radical acts involved ripping apart a picture of Pope John Paul II.¹²⁹ The Cranberries with their popular song "Zombie" and bands such as Stiff Little Fingers and Barleycorn also used their music and visibility to address the Troubles.

What makes Thin Lizzy and U2 different from these other groups and artists who spoke out about the Troubles and ventured into global activism is the mixed background of the bands and the scale of their popularity and influence. Thin Lizzy was unique owing to its bi-racial composition, especially at a time when people of color were uncommon in Ireland and hardly present in the music business. U2 was exceptional in its amalgamation of Protestant, Catholic, Irish, and British bandmates. Most importantly, however, both

¹²⁸ "RUC 'Colluded in the Massacre of Miami Showband.'" *Daily Mail* (London, England), December 15, 2011.

¹²⁹ Olivia Wilde, "Sinéad O'Connor." *TIME Magazine* 195, no. 9/10 (March 16, 2020): 113.

Thin Lizzy and U2 used music and the stage to address, albeit in different ways, the religious, geographical, and political divisions in Ireland during the last three decades of the twentieth century.

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U2. “Raised by Wolves.” Recorded ca. 2009-2014. Track 7 on *Songs of Innocence*.

Island, CD.

U2. "The Troubles." Recorded ca. 2009-2014. Track 11 on *Songs of Innocence*. Island, CD.

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